

A Biography of and Interview with Mitchell E. Kornet, DVM

Class of 1979, College of Veterinary Medicine, Cornell University

Author and Interviewer: Michelle Pesce, DVM Candidate, Class of 2012

Photo provided by Mitch Kornet



*Dr. Kornet examining a patient at
Mid Island Animal Hospital*

A Tradition of Mentoring

When Mitchell Kornet took his 89-cent hamster to the veterinarian for a six-dollar veterinary appointment in 1968, he was making an investment in a good deal more than the rodent's well-being. Dr. Albert Droleskey's kind attention that evening was what first led 13-year-old Mitch to direct his aptitude for science towards veterinary medicine.¹ The 1979 graduate of the New York State College of Veterinary Medicine considers himself fortunate to have had a series of mentors throughout his education and early career.

Their guidance has helped him establish a successful small animal practice with loyal clientele, as well as a deep-rooted sense of benevolence towards students pursuing a career in veterinary medicine.

As the first of his family to attend college, Mitch was apprehensive about attending Cornell as an undergraduate. After finding his footing academically in his freshman year, he sought experience in the large animal clinic as a sophomore. Dr. Lawrence Kramer,² recently appointed as head of the clinic in 1974, offered Mitch a job in the dispensary in his junior year. He also took a special interest in the 18-year-old, inviting him along on farm calls, helping him establish self-confidence, and finally providing him a letter of recommendation for his application to veterinary school.

During the summer following his first year of veterinary college, Mitch returned to the practice he had visited with his hamster years before. Dr. Droleskey had sold the practice to Dr. Richard Lange,³ but in spite of the change in ownership, Mitch's time working at the practice was just as influential as his first visit there.

"He taught me so many things regarding veterinary medicine but his greatest contribution to me was showing me how much fun veterinary medicine could be. We discussed cases and procedures and even social events. I told Dr. Lange

¹ Albert H. Droleskey (Texas A&M '43), owner of Queens Village Dog and Cat Hospital, New York. Deceased 1992.

² Lawrence L. Kramer, professor of veterinary surgery, director of Large Animal Hospital.

³ Richard C. Lange '65, currently resides in Douglaston, NY.

that I had just started playing golf and he invited me to play golf on what he called a little course in Bethpage, NY. That little course was the famed Bethpage Black and I can remember losing 10 balls on the first nine holes.”

As a veterinary student, Mitch enjoyed the camaraderie of his classmates. Personalities and backgrounds prior to starting school were diverse among the group, but the common factors were a genuine dedication to the care of animals and respect for those who taught it. He also appreciated that faculty.

“Our professors were leaders who demonstrated their commitment to veterinary medicine by example. Everyone wanted to be a deLahunta, Kirk, Scott, Bolton, or Smith when they graduated.”

Following graduation, Dr. Kornet enjoyed the mentorship of Dr. Victor Rendano,⁴ who led a radiology rounds group on Long Island, as well as Dr. Arnold Lesser,⁵ for whom he worked for three years. The newly minted veterinarian learned from Dr. Lesser’s expertise in surgery, and in return was able to contribute his own recently acquired knowledge of pathophysiology not commonly encountered in private practice. Dr. Kornet had been among the youngest students in his graduating class, and his youth was recognized by clients when he took ownership of Mid Island Animal Hospital in Hicksville, NY in 1983 at age 28.



Photo provided by Mitch Kornet

Dr. Kornet and wife Renee at his DVM graduation, 1979

“I received a hostile call from a client one afternoon... she proceeded to give me a list of demands that included which employees to retain and hours that I should be open. I listened carefully and was very polite. Then Mrs. Weber said, ‘and one more thing young man.’ That didn’t sound right to me and I had to take control of the conversation – quickly. So without thinking, I said, ‘That’s enough Mrs. Weber, from now on when you address me you will call me Dr. Young Man.’”

⁴ Victor T. Rendano, UP ’72 (radiologist), Veterinary Radiology Consultation, Lansing, NY.

⁵ Arnold S. Lesser, UP ’69 (surgeon), currently, New York Veterinary Specialty and Emergency Center, Farmingdale, NY.



Mid Island Animal Hospital, which celebrates its 50th anniversary June 2011

Mrs. Weber hung up on “Dr. Young Man” that day, but did eventually return to the practice. Mid Island Animal Hospital evolved into a busy American Animal Hospital Association-accredited small animal practice as hours were extended, emergency appointments were invited, and the employee base expanded.

In 1998, Dr. Kornet began volunteering as a member of the Long Island Veterinary Medical Association’s Disaster Preparedness Plan, making arrangements among the veterinary community for such eventualities as hurricanes and floods. A far cry from anyone’s expectations, LIVMA’s plan was put into action following September 11th, 2001. On alternating weeks through November 3rd 2001, Dr. Kornet assembled teams composed of three veterinarians and technicians, who worked 12-hour shifts around the clock. The difficulty was not in recruiting volunteers to staff the veterinary triage site for search and rescue dogs, but in telling prospective volunteers that they would need to wait their turn. For his efforts, Dr. Kornet was named Long Island’s Veterinarian of the Year in 2001.



Dr. Kornet and Dr. Donald Smith (Cornell), 2007

Over the course of his career, Dr. Kornet has remained closely associated with the Cornell community. His involvement with the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Alumni Association led to his election as president of the group in 2007, and he has served as an advisor and mentor to undergraduates as part of the CALS Alumni Career Link. He has felt privileged to work with at least ten students who went on to become veterinarians. He believes that the benefit to both mentor and mentee is lifelong, and he takes pride in knowing he has made an impact on the career of a future veterinarian.

“What’s remarkable to me is that no matter what generation we are in, we are all the same. Veterinarians want to learn, do well, and be good doctors for the sake of our patients. We love animals, and we have unending energy to make the lives of our patients better. And because of the broad scope of our training we are capable of doing some extraordinary things.”



Photo provided by Mitch Kornet

*Dr. Kornet and Renee (center), with Robin (L)
and Allison (R)*

Interview

Subject: Mitchell E. Kornet, DVM
Interviewer: Michelle Pesce, DVM candidate 2012 (Cornell University)
Interview Date: February 17, 2011
Location: Interview by e-mail correspondence



Photo © Renee Kornet, 2010

Dr. Mitchell Kornet with author (Michelle Pesce '12), 2010

Interviewer's Note:

As a student in Dean Smith's Versatile Profession course in February 2010, I took great interest in his reference to Dr. Mitch Kornet, a Long Island veterinarian whom he mentioned in the final lecture. I have had the privilege of working with several veterinarians that I would consider mentors, and wondered if Dr. Kornet's practice would merit a visit. I mailed him a letter and a copy of my résumé, and what followed was one of the most worthwhile summer jobs I've ever had. At Mid Island Animal Hospital, the greatest care and attention was provided to every patient, whether routine or unusual. Education was emphasized for veterinary students as well as for those aspiring to become licensed technicians. (Michelle Pesce '12)

Michelle Pesce in Ithaca

What sparked your initial interest in veterinary medicine, and what were some of your experiences along your path towards beginning vet school?

Dr. Mitchell Kornet:

I always had an affinity for animals. Growing up I loved to visit zoos, and I was very comfortable when I was around all types of animals. I can remember my father bringing

home wild turtles and orphan rabbits that he found when he was working. In kindergarten I brought a steady stream of animals to show and tell, and my teacher called me the class zoologist. I helped raise and nurse any animal that came into my home, and always enjoyed the experience.

When I was five my parents thought that I had an interest in science, probably because I really enjoyed learning about dinosaurs. They bought me a basic microscope kit and I had a blast trying to examine whatever structure that would fit on the stage. One story that my mother loves to tell is how I took the eyeball out of a dead fish that I found at a nearby pond and examined it under my microscope. The problem was that the eyeball fell onto the carpet in my living room, never to be found again. That was the end of my dissections in my house.

After kindergarten I had a series of pocket pets and birds that I took care of. I grew up in a small garden apartment in Queens, New York. Unfortunately the apartment complex didn't allow tenants to own dogs and cats, but that didn't stop my father from bringing home a puppy when I was about 6 years old. I really loved this puppy but two weeks after he came into my home, our neighbor knocked on our door and said "I hear that you have a dog." The following Sunday my parents took me to an amusement park, and when I came home the dog was gone. They were forced to find a home for him. So I had to make do with visiting with my grandmother's Chihuahuas and adopting a hamster.

There were several hamsters over the years, but a seminal event happened when I was 13 years old. One scorching summer day in August I brought my hamster Ladybug into my parent's bedroom to enjoy our new air conditioner. I felt bad for her and thought that she would be happier in the cool air. The next day when I woke up I found a very sick little pet in her cage. She didn't eat overnight and was all puffed up. I had no idea what to do. I never went to a veterinarian's office because my family never owned a cat or a dog, and I never thought that anyone would consider taking a hamster to a veterinarian.

My parents cared enough to call a local veterinarian. He told my parents that an office visit would cost \$6 and they could buy me another hamster for 89 cents. The problem is I wanted that hamster, not a new one. They called another veterinarian, Dr. Albert H. Droleskey¹ in Queens Village, NY and he told them to come over that evening. I remember that visit like it was yesterday. Dr. Droleskey told me my hamster had pneumonia, explained that if he gave her an injection of penicillin she would die because of the unique bacteria that she had in her intestines. He then showed me how to give her an oral antibiotic. He asked me to call him the next day. I walked out of his office and down the steps to my parent's car, and I remember thinking to myself that I want to be a veterinarian. Dr. Droleskey's kindness was unforgettable.

¹ Albert H. Droelskey (Texas A&M '43), owner of Queens Village Dog and Cat Hospital, New York. Deceased 1992.

I was told that I was good in science in elementary and middle school by teachers. Several people told me that I should become a doctor. For some reason I never was interested in medicine and I was clueless as to what I wanted to do “when I grew up.” However, that August day shaped every part of my life from that day forward.

I went home and nursed Ladybug back to health and told a few people that I think I want to be a veterinarian. Luckily everyone, especially my parents, were thrilled with that idea and encouraged me. It sounded like it would be a great job, but frankly as a 13 year old I had no idea what it took to become a vet. Then in 9th grade when I was 14 years old—I took 7th, 8th and 9th grade in two years in an accelerated New York City school system program—a guidance counselor announced on the public address system that students interested in careers in agriculture which included farming, horticulture, and careers with animals including veterinary medicine could apply to a program in vocational agriculture at the [John Bowne High School](#) in Flushing, NY. I barely paid attention to the announcement because I couldn’t understand what agriculture had to do with becoming a veterinarian, but my friend Neal Kavey elbowed me in the ribs and said “Kornet, you want to be a vet, you should go there.”

Going into high school, I didn’t want to go out of my district. The trip to Bowne would take an hour each way on public transportation. Besides that, the school’s population was 3200, of which only 125 were agricultural students. How could I leave my friends? It just wasn’t something I wanted to do. At dinner that evening I mentioned the program to my parents. They encouraged me and drove me to the school the following weekend just to see where it was. During the trip to the school I was trying to find any excuse not to apply the program. The first excuse that I came up with was that the school was across the street from a huge cemetery and I didn’t want to look out of the windows of the school and see dead people all day.

When I got serious and looked at the program carefully, I found many other things to object to. Once a student was accepted to Bowne, he was committed to go to school the summer before the program started. We were required to take classes in the morning and work on the farm behind the school, and then during the subsequent summers, we had to leave home to work on a dairy farm in upstate New York. This was supposed to be my fun times growing up, and giving up my summers and leaving my friends was not appealing.

Over several weeks I considered what I should do, and it was clear that I really wanted to become a vet. I applied to the program and luckily I was admitted. Looking back, I am certain that going to John Bowne High School was the one of the most important experiences in my life. It focused my interest in veterinary medicine and gave me a goal. Few people are

lucky enough to know what they want to do, and then have the opportunity carry out and attain their dream.

My years at John Bowne High School were memorable. I enjoyed all of the dairy, equine and poultry courses. I hated anything that had to do with plants. Horticulture, agronomy and pomology just didn't do it for me. I learned a lot on the farms and felt very accomplished when it came to milking cows and baling hay.

I can honestly say that there wasn't anything that I wanted to become more than a veterinarian, but I had one alternate goal. I wanted to pitch for the New York Mets. Growing up in Queens, I spent many days and nights at Shea Stadium. I spent so much time at the stadium I that I tell people that Shea was my summer camp. What's really funny is that when I was 14 years old I was about the height I am now, 5' 9". I was pretty big for my age, and I thought that I could throw a baseball very hard. In 10th grade my dreams of becoming a Met ended in tryouts for the high school team. The coach told me to go to the mound and pitch to a batter. I did something that probably never has been done in the history of baseball. The coach was standing in the on deck circle. I was so nervous I could feel my body shaking. I wound up, turned and released the ball: I hit the coach, who was about 30 feet from my target. I can remember him raising his hands and saying, "What the ----- are you doing?" After several pitches I still didn't come close to home plate. Tryouts ended and I went home and told my parents that I better study hard because, "I'm not going to be a Met, I'm going to be a vet."

Working on the farms had its challenges. The work was very physical and even though I was 5'9" I don't think I weighed more than 115 pounds. Sometimes I could barely lift the bales of hay that we were stacking. It was also scary being away from home, living with a family in a totally strange environment and culture. I got along very well with the farmer at first, but after a few weeks he made a comment that was a preview to what was going to happen on August 12, 1970.

The summer program was supervised by a 4-H office in Oneonta. I left New York City on a bus in late June with 2 other students in my class. When I got off the bus and was picked up in Oneonta, I was accompanied by two other classmates. We all got into the 4-H agent's car and were taken to our respective farms. My farm in Otego, NY was the first stop. I eagerly greeted my summer family and said goodbye to my classmates. Nothing was said about the day we arrived until mid July, when the farmer said to me "I'm sure glad I got you. I thought I was going to get the 'darkie'." The farmer was referring to an African-American student, one of my classmates. I was really disappointed in the farmer because until this point I really liked and respected him.

On August 12th, I learned that the farmer's racist view were not limited to African-Americans. It was 7:30 PM and dusk, and one of the cows from the herd didn't come in to be milked. The farm was 180 acres, much of it wooded and hilly. The farmer said to me, "Go out and look for the cow and don't come back until you find her." During my preparation for the summer, our teachers at Bowne told us that if we failed to complete the summer program, we would be removed from the school. This was held over our heads and all of the students did their best finish the summer.

As a 15 year old, I was afraid to go out in the dark and look for this cow. I thought that it was dangerous and I told the farmer. He warned me if I didn't go out and find the cow I would be sent back to New York the next day and fail the summer. I was faced with a tough decision. After a few minutes of harsh talking the farmer told me to get into the house, and as I turned around he took his size 11 boot and kicked me as hard as he could in my backside. My response was what I thought every 115-pound 15-year-old should do: I turned around, uttered and unspeakable expletive, and landed a right hook on this 6'2" farmer's jaw.

That's when things got bad! The farmer picked me up over his head and threw me into the manure gutter. While all this was happening, the farmer's wife was in the barn observing the altercation. When I picked myself out of the manure gutter, she uttered words that I never heard before: "It must be your damn Jewish Blood." That hurt so much and I couldn't believe what had happened. I ran into the house with so many thoughts. I was worried about my safety, who should I call, and what would happen to me with the agriculture program. I was sure that I was going to be removed from the program because I didn't finish the summer, and that would be the end of my path to becoming a veterinarian.

I went home the next day and then went to the school to speak to the director, Mr. George Chrein, and explain what happened. Mr. Chrein was very disturbed about the incident and, to my relief, he told me that I would have a better experience the next summer.

Part of the curriculum in the agriculture program was career and college exploration. Students were taught about the requirements to become a veterinarian. One assignment was to write to several colleges and get information about the application process, the costs of attending college, and other relevant information regarding a career in veterinary medicine. I remember writing to Cornell and receiving a packet in the mail with a veterinary college catalogue. I was thrilled to read everything and I was really happy to see that tuition was only about \$165 per semester for New York State residents.

The program looked wonderful and from that point on Cornell was the only school I wanted to go to. One thing that I learned was that it was so competitive to be admitted to veterinary

college. When I first decided to become a veterinarian I had no idea that only one in ten were admitted.

Many people encouraged me to become a vet in high school, but some people, my friends, my parents friends and even some teachers told me it was too hard. I kept hearing, “It’s impossible to get in, don’t even try.” One person told me that a girl in my neighborhood also wanted to go to Cornell to be a vet and Cornell would only accept one of us because we were from the same neighborhood. She also added that the girl was smarter than me so that I had little chance of getting in. Luckily, I was so focused that nothing could deter me. I just studied hard, did the best I could, and looked forward to applying.

My decision to become a veterinarian and attend John Bowne High School resulted in another wonderful life changing event for me. Without this chance occurrence I’m not certain that all of the pieces would have fallen into place for me to be successful in my pursuit of veterinary medicine. I was painfully shy in those days, and the only social interests I had were related to sports. However in my sophomore year I noticed a very pretty classmate walking in the halls. Unfortunately we were never in the same class and I never had an opportunity to talk to her. That all changed in my physics class in senior year. Renee Hochman and I were in the same class, and when it came time to choose lab groups of four, somehow I managed to get myself into her group. One thing led to another, and we became friends. Physics was a great class and I loved it. There was one constant when it came to the academics, Renee always got better grades than me. Her final grade for that semester was 98!

Just before our Christmas vacation I got the nerve to ask Renee if she wanted to go out on a date with me and the rest is history. I knew that I was going to marry her on our second date, and what’s really unbelievable is that I was 16.

Our first date was at the old New York Coliseum in Mahattan. This was a big event in New York because there was an opportunity for the public to get close to many species of animals. I was even interviewed by a young local reporter named Geraldo Rivera. I was working as an animal attendant during the vacation and I asked Renee to meet me there. I can remember watching for Renee and seeing her come up the escalator. I was in the middle of the pig pen taking care of the baby pigs and I was just hoping that she would like animals. As it turned out Renee loves all animals and we certainly had a lot to talk about on that first date. As you will see later, Renee was instrumental in my success in college and an important reason for my focus.

In my senior year of high school I applied to three colleges, Kansas State University, Ohio State, and Cornell. I was very lucky because Kansas State accepted me in late September. That took the pressure off of me, but I only wanted to go to Cornell. I went to visit Cornell

that fall with two classmates and had an interview. All that was left was for me to hear from the admissions office, and in the late winter of 1972 I received my acceptance letter. The first part of my goal was achieved.

Michelle:

Were there any particular challenges you faced leading up to and during vet school?

Dr. Kornet:

Going to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell was a very scary experience for me. I was the first Kornet to go to college and I didn't know what to expect. I had only been to Cornell during my interview the previous year. I remember my parents taking me to a bus station and traveling to Ithaca with one suitcase and my new electric typewriter in August of 1972.

Orientation week was a magical experience. It was so much fun meeting students from all over the world and I quickly became part of the Cornell culture. One thing stood out: my classmates were very smart. During my first days sitting in my dormitory with my new friends I heard about their astronomical SATs, incredibly high grades, AP courses and extracurricular successes. I was a little unnerved but I still loved my new environment.

There was a lot of work in my semester, but in the first few weeks I felt very comfortable. I was taking introductory biology, chemistry and animal science, and the required freshman writing seminar. The first sign of trouble came when I got my grade back on my initial writing assignment. It was a three-page paper about the book *Huckleberry Finn*. The professor's comments were actually lengthier than my paper and they started with, "Frankly, you have many problems in writing." He then proceeded to write the word redundant more times than I care to remember. It was a devastating indictment on my writing, especially after he praised the other students in my section for their excellent papers.

A few weeks later I had back-to-back tests in biology and chemistry. I wasn't too concerned after I took the tests. The biology test was multiple choice. I thought it was a little unusual because some of the choices were "a and b", "a and e", etc., but I felt I did well. Chemistry was 150 points and after taking the test I thought that I must have gotten at least 140. That's how it usually went in high school.

A few days later, my class received our tests back. The chemistry professor told us that we did pretty well as a class. The average was 92 out of 150. I looked left, right, and behind me. I saw 500 very smart students in my class and thought, "Oh no, I bet I didn't get 140." My test came back with a grade of 96, which was curved to a C+. A few days later my biology test came back with the same grade, C+. Coincidentally all of my new friends from the dorm received the same grades as I did.

I was devastated. I knew what types of grades were needed for vet school, and I wasn't close. I thought that I was working as hard as I could and I had no idea how to improve. I even called my parents and told them that I was very lucky to be at Cornell with so many smart people, but I wasn't smart enough to become a vet. It was a tough call and I'm sure my parents felt very bad for me. As usual, they encouraged me and urged me to keep trying.

I struggled through the rest of the semester, but I noticed that two of my animal science classmates were getting A's in everything. What were they doing that I wasn't? After a few weeks I learned their secret: they were working harder than me. In fact, they were totally consumed with their classes and they spent their time outside of classes rewriting their notes and studying every day.

At this point I realized that I had to change my habits if I was going to be successful at Cornell. Now I joke and tell people that I gave up all worldly pleasures during my undergraduate days and just worked. I would get up at 7AM on Saturdays and Sundays and go to the library and just study until 11 PM. It was intense, but I knew that was what I had to do to succeed. In many ways, Renee was instrumental in my success. First, she was my girlfriend and I was totally committed to her. I had no desire to date other girls. Renee was in college at Binghamton University majoring in English and busy with her own education. She knew how much I wanted to become a veterinarian so she just encouraged me to work hard. I had no social demands on me. I gave up football games, hockey games, and just went to a few social functions.

There weren't immediate results. I finished the semester with a C+ in biology and a B- in chemistry. My animal science grade was an A- and my average for the semester was a shade over a B. However something special happened to me in the second semester. I learned how to think and study like a scientist and my grades soared. It felt so good to me, and in later years I realized that Cornell University empowered me to accomplish anything I put my mind to. I am so thankful for that experience.

Michelle:

How did your undergraduate education at Cornell play into your career, and what led you specifically to Cornell's Vet School? What were your experiences with the application process to veterinary college and your time as a student at the College of Veterinary Medicine?

Dr. Kornet:

In the late 1960's it was not unusual for the College of Veterinary medicine to admit students after two years of undergraduate work. My original goal was to spend two years as an undergraduate and then matriculate into the vet school. I was disappointed when the college

changed the requirement to three years of undergraduate work. In any case, I was able to complete of the prerequisite courses and apply during my third year.

Because of Cornell's rigorous undergraduate program I felt very comfortable applying early. In those days there were only 18 veterinary colleges and it was nearly impossible for a New York State student to get into any college other than Cornell. I wrote letters to about 10 other colleges requesting an admissions application and I was shocked to receive nine letters back telling me to apply to Cornell. Several schools even sent me Cornell's address. The only other college that permitted me to apply was the University of Pennsylvania.

During the second semester of my junior year I received a letter from Cornell asking me to come for an interview. The Cornell veterinary college interview was rumored to be a grueling event. I knew several upper classman who described their experiences to me and I was scared, but ready.

In those days I was very nervous about any special event. I would get butterflies in my stomach before tests or when I met new people. I saw this interview as the link to my career aspirations and I definitely was very, very apprehensive. However, I usually got rid of my nervousness as soon as an event started, so I was really looking forward to the interview.

I arrived at the new Veterinary Research Tower in plenty of time.² I was dressed in a new suit, hoping to impress my interviewers. Another applicant was also waiting for an interview. We chatted a while and then I was called into the office. There were seven faculty members sitting at a rectangular table and I was asked to sit at the head. After our greetings, I was asked a question by Dr. Howard Evans that I will never forget.³ He asked if there was any animal that could be frozen in liquid nitrogen and then thawed out with diathermy and still live. I knew that this was not a question that I was expected to know so in many ways it relaxed me. Dr. Evans informed me that the animal was a hamster and I thanked him for that information. He had read my application and he knew what event inspired me.

There were many other fact-based questions that came up during the interview. I thought that I answered them well. One person on the admissions committee told me that he was a concerned that I was applying with only 77 college credits while many other applicants had 120 credits. He asked why the school should pick me over people who were in college longer. I felt that was an adversarial stance, but I answered it as directly as I could. I told him that I had done everything in my academic career since I was 13 to get into vet school, and another 43 credits would not add any benefit to my career as a veterinarian. That was quite an exchange, but I was glad that I answered the question the way I did. I had a feeling that the

² The Veterinary Research Tower was opened in 1974.

³ Howard Evans, PhD, professor of anatomy

admissions committee might have wanted me to spend another year in college, but I was satisfied with the interview.

As I said earlier, in those days many things made me nervous, and to this day I feel sorry for the student who had the interview after me. When I walked out of the room, my face must have been beet red, because the student looked at me and said, “What happened, you look terrible.” He told me that my face was totally flushed. That student must have been so scared about what was going to happen to him in that locked room.

As it turned out, the student after me was Artie McCormick, my future classmate.⁴ To this day every time I see Artie he reminds me about my red face. It’s funny, these days, just through experience, I virtually never get nervous. I’ve spoken to dozens of groups and hundreds of people at one time, and I’m just as cool as I could be in what used to be terrifying situations.

On May 1, 1975 I received the letter I had coveted since I was 13. Even though I only had 77 credits at the time, I was a member of the class of 1979. As it turned out, I believe that I was the youngest member of my class.

Classes started in late August of 1975. My class of 72 students was so impressive. I was in awe of the intelligence, drive and diversity of my classmates. There was a wide array of experiences and personalities and I loved getting to know as many people as I could. The Viet Nam war had ended three years earlier and I was most impressed by the veterans who went back to school to become veterinarians. Everyone in my class seemed thrilled to be starting vet school, and it was a great time.

We were assigned to our anatomy lab groups by alphabetical order. I was lab partners with Len Kreger,⁵ and right next to us was Mike Keem⁶ and Sunny Knox.⁷ It’s funny, looking back at those original alphabetical assignments, great lifelong friendships were forged. I spent four years working closely with Len and Mike, and I noticed that the same thing happened in other parts of the alphabet.

Being exposed to medical terminology was a new experience for me. I went to neurology rounds and senior seminars often in the first year, and listening to the clinicians and upper classman speak was like listening to a foreign language for me. Week after week I listened and didn’t understand anything. Then sometime in the second year, I went to a senior seminar and everything clicked. I actually could follow a case description and think in my

⁴ Arthur E. McCormick ’79

⁵ Leonard D. Kreger ’79, small animal practice, Liberty, PA

⁶ Michael D. Keem ’79, small animal practice (Aurora Pet Hospital), East Aurora, NY

⁷ Alison Knox ’79, small animal practice, Essex Junction, VT

new learned language. That was an important and rewarding part of my evolution into a clinician.

There were definitely ups and downs over the four years. My classmates seemed pretty happy during the first year, but I think that many of us didn't enjoy what I call the "ologies" of the second year. There was a tremendous amount of memorization in bacteriology, virology, protozoology and mycology, and sometimes it seemed so far away from clinical medicine.

Our third year was very special. We finally started to do clinical work, and it was great putting everything we learned in the previous years together in a practical way. We were all like sponges in junior surgery, soaking up any information that was offered to us. Although I love surgery now, I had some difficulties at first. I remember one resident in large animal junior surgery being impatient with me. I contaminated my glove and I went to change gloves. He watched me carefully and found fault with my method of regloving—four times. I wasted four pairs of gloves and the resident wasn't nice about it either. I felt like I was in hot water that day, and while I was doing some procedure on the jejunum of my horse, a mesenteric vessel started hemorrhaging. I'm not sure how it happened, but I was in a slight panic. The very patient and understanding new assistant professor of the class saw that I was struggling and came over. He gently assured me that it was not a problem and sutured the vessel. I am always thankful that the professor, Dr. Donald Smith,⁸ was so nice to me.

Something else very special happened in my third year. I was getting married in December. Renee was finishing her masters degree in speech pathology at Queens College in New York, and our six-year, sometimes long distance relationship, was finally going to end in marriage. My class was very excited for us. To my recollection, a gift was given to us by my classmates and as a thank you, Renee and I hosted a party in January when the new semester started. We had an apartment in Lansing West, and we invited the whole class to come over to celebrate. We didn't have much furniture, but we had the necessary ingredient for a fun night: a big keg of beer in the middle of our living room. The party was a great way to introduce Renee to my classmates, and it helped bond her to my friends and veterinary medicine.

In my third year I found a great place to study. When I tell my non-veterinary friends that my favorite place to study was in a barn they all laugh. I found an office in I-barn, just off the breezeway in the large animal clinic. The office was so conducive to both individual and group study and I learned so much working with Len Kreger, George Palmer,⁹ and Steve

⁸ Donald F. Smith, DVM, assistant professor of large animal surgery

⁹ George W Palmer '79, large animal practice, Plattsburgh, NY. George's father was in the Cornell Class of 1950, and his son is in Class of 2013.

Sanford.¹⁰ I was the only small animal person in those days and I learned so much about large animals from my study partners.

Looking back at my four years in vet school, my overarching impression was that everyone in my class wanted to develop into good veterinarians because of our love for animals. We all worked hard, studied hard and strived to develop into the best doctors that we could be. We were in an inspiring environment at Cornell and we were proud to be a part of it.

Michelle:

What kind of mentorship did you have as a student and after graduation, and what have you hoped to accomplish in providing mentorship to students?

Dr. Kornet:

I think role models shape a veterinarian's career in so many ways. Doctors who we work with influence our choice of interests, the way we approach our profession, and how we interact with our colleagues, coworkers, and clients. We try to emulate people whom we respect and when a person who you really like is accessible and takes an interest in you, a mentor-protégé relationship is born.

A signature of my professional life is encouraging students of all ages to pursue a career in veterinary medicine. I have hosted dozens of class trips from kindergarten to high school and described my life as a veterinarian. In addition, I have hired many pre-veterinary and veterinary students for summer positions.

There are many reasons that I am so active with students. First, in order to be a mentor you have to enjoy working with students. For me, I love the enthusiasm and energy that exudes from someone trying to become a veterinarian. It reminds me of how much I love my job, and how important it is to have people helping and supporting you.

I learned about mentorship from many veterinarians who took an interest in me. One of my first mentors was Lawrence L. Kramer, DVM.¹¹ During my undergraduate days at Cornell I was looking to get more large animal experience. I was eligible for the work study program at Cornell, which was part of a financial aid package. I walked up one day in my sophomore year to the large animal clinic and asked for a job. I was directed to Gil Howald, an administrator and Claude Ames, a manager in the large animal clinic for an interview. They were very nice to me and gave me the position of cleaning up the large animal clinic two days a week after clinics were over.

¹⁰ Stephen P. Sanford '79, mixed animal practice (Derby Pond Veterinary Hospital), Derby, VT

¹¹ Lawrence L. Kramer, professor of veterinary surgery, director of Large Animal Hospital.

It was a lonely job because most of the activity was over after I got to the clinic, but I was in awe of the clinicians, professors and vet students. After learning what my duties were, I really enjoyed breaking from my daily studying routine and doing physical work. I remember one affable large animal professor, J.T. Vaughan talking to me a lot. Dr. Vaughan left Cornell after the semester (he later became Dean of Auburn University), but I think that he noticed that I worked hard while I was in the clinic.¹²

The following fall as I was starting my junior year, I received a call from Dr. Kramer who was just appointed to head the large animal clinic. He told me that there was an opening in the large animal dispensary for an assistant. My job was to fill prescriptions that the large animal clinicians ordered for the hospitalized patients. I thought that this was a job of great responsibility and I jumped at the opportunity. I worked with Mr. Bill Bayley who acted as the pharmacist.

Dr. Kramer talked to me a lot and took great interest in me. I told him about my experiences on dairy farms, my hopes of becoming a veterinarian and that I was going to apply to Cornell for the following year. Dr. Kramer asked me if I wanted to ride with him on some farm calls that he went on and I eagerly accepted his invitation.

We really forged a great friendship. I was very serious in those days and Dr. Kramer noticed it. I think one of his goals was to “loosen me up” and make me smile more. He did a great job. As I worked in my new job, and with Dr. Kramer, I felt so good about myself, and I relaxed more and more.

One day in December he called me into his office and started talking about the life of a veterinarian. In line with his theme of having me be more relaxed, he indicated that he thought I would have trouble being a veterinarian if I didn’t learn to have more fun. I was concerned that he thought my temperament wasn’t suitable to be a veterinarian, and that he might discourage my application. At the end of our talk, Dr. Kramer gave me a letter and told me to open it up when I got home.

When I got home I read the one of the most important letters in my life: my veterinary college recommendation from Dr. Kramer, and it was a good one! Looking back at my time with Dr. Kramer I realized that his interest in me was a major factor in my admittance and also it inspired me to help students interested in veterinary medicine.

During my summer vacations in college I tried desperately to get a job with a small animal veterinarian. I went from office to office trying to explain that I was a serious student from

¹² John Thomas Vaughan, professor of large animal surgery, dean Auburn College of Veterinary Medicine (1977-95)

Cornell University and I wanted to go to vet school. Although I had no success for a year I met some wonderful and caring veterinarians. I remember walking into Great Neck Animal Hospital after my freshman year and meeting Brian Rind, DVM.¹³ Dr. Rind showed me around his office but unfortunately told me that he had no openings. But he did something that I will never forget: he invited to go out to lunch with him. I was much too intimidated to accept, but to this day I still appreciate his gesture. Thirty-seven years later, Dr. Rind is still a generous and giving veterinarian. He's invited me to play golf with him many times and I feel honored to be his colleague.

Finally, in my sophomore year I was offered a kennel assistant job at a veterinary office near my home. It has been said that we all need cloudy days so that we can appreciate sunny days. This job was my cloudy day because the veterinarian I worked for was mean to clients, his staff and especially me. While I have been inspired by many mentors, I think of this doctor as the anti-mentor, and many things that I do in my day to day life has been influenced by this doctor. Frequently I think about how he would handle a situation and I do the opposite.

This job was my first experience with small animals and I had a lot to learn. Restraint of the patients was not natural to me, and I was not good at it. The veterinarian wanted the patients to be perfectly behaved when I was holding them and any deviation from perfection would result in a comment like, "I can't believe that a two-pound puppy is stronger than you" or a backhanded swat to my hands and telling me to let someone else hold. Cats were even worse. The doctor taught me to really clamp down and scruff all cats in any situation. The cats absolutely hated me and showed their dissatisfaction with frequent scratches and bites. My arms and hands looked like a war zone. Even more unbelievable is on some occasions while walking past the doctor he would give me subtle shove. I just couldn't understand him.

Clients would be berated for the littlest infraction, and the other staff members feared this doctor. A frequent comment from the clients to me was that this doctor must be really good because he's so mean! Lunch breaks during the day were forbidden and I would sneak my lunch into the office and eat surreptitiously behind cages.

After a few weeks I think that the doctor started appreciate my work ethic. I was always on time and tried very hard to please him. So one day he said, "Mitch, I think that you are doing ok so I am going to give you a 15-cent raise." Then he had ruined the moment by saying "You're pretty good, but you will never be a John Randolph."¹⁴ John Randolph was the previously abused assistant and I heard many stories from the doctor about how wonderful he was. As it turned out, John went to the College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell and is now

¹³ Brian Rind '65, small animal practice (Great Neck Animal Hospital), Great Neck, NY

¹⁴ John F. Randolph '77, assistant professor of small animal medicine.

a world renowned professor. Whenever I see John we always share stories about the abuse that we shared.

The following summer, I was lucky enough to get an assistant job with Richard Lange, DVM.¹⁵ The location of this job had great significance because it was in office where I brought my hamster. Dr. Lange bought the practice from Dr. Droleskey several years before and I was thrilled to be working there. Dr. Lange was kind, funny and practical. He taught me so many things regarding veterinary medicine but his greatest contribution to me was showing me how much fun veterinary medicine could be. We discussed cases and procedures and even social events. I told Dr. Lange that I had just started playing golf and he invited me to play golf on what he called a little course in Bethpage, NY. That little course was the famed Bethpage Black and I can remember losing 10 balls on the first 9 holes.

Dr. Lange was such a strong influence on my career that even today I hear myself echoing his recommendations, “Just put the pill in a little liverwurst and he’ll eat it.”

In veterinary school, our professors were so influential in our careers. They were such a dynamic group that everyone looked up to. Our professors were leaders who demonstrated their commitment to veterinary medicine by example. Everyone wanted to be deLahunta,¹⁶ Kirk,¹⁷ Scott,¹⁸ Bolton¹⁹ or Smith when they graduated. Even though Dr. Hornbuckle²⁰ was a relatively new professor in the college, his skills as a diagnostician were legendary. He taught all of us the importance of a thorough physical exam and we were amazed at our ability to diagnose conditions by palpation.

What was great about being married in vet school was that Renee developed an understanding of how important our professors influenced us and she respected my mentors as much as I do. Sometimes when I get home from work and tell her about how I felt a foreign body in a dog’s abdomen she will smile and say, “You pulled a Hornbuckle.”

My first job was at [East Meadow Animal Hospital](#) on Long Island. The hospital was part of a group of veterinarians who brought a radiologist to the New York area to read our radiographs and discuss cases. Before graduating I was told that the radiologist couldn’t come to New York anymore and the group was going to dissolve. When I heard this, I went to Victor Rendano, VMD’s office and asked if he would be interested in leading our group.

¹⁵ Richard C. Lange ’65, currently resides in Douglaston, NY.

¹⁶ Alexander deLahunta ’58, professor of comparative anatomy and clinical neurology

¹⁷ Robert W. Kirk ’46, professor of small animal medicine (deceased)

¹⁸ Danny W Scott (UC Davis ’71), assistant professor of dermatology

¹⁹ Gary R. Bolton, associate professor of cardiology (deceased)

²⁰ William Hornbuckle, assistant professor of small animal medicine

Dr. Rendano enthusiastically accepted the offer and he taught and inspired dozens of veterinarians for 25 years on Long Island.²¹

After I graduated there were several mentors who encouraged me and shaped my career. I worked for Arnold Lesser, VMD for three years.²² Dr. Lesser was a private practitioner with an interest in surgery. His interest was so great that during my time with him, he was studying to become board certified in surgery. Just graduating from vet school I was full of book knowledge and Dr. Lesser and I used to study together on my days off. I helped him with obscure pathophysiology and he helped me with surgery. It was a great relationship.

When I graduated I made it point to help any student who asked me for advice or help in becoming a veterinarian. Part of it was to pay tribute to my mentors and show all of the appreciation I have for their help, and part of it was just to empower students to accomplish as much as they can. I think about my struggles and realize that any bit of encouragement can change someone's life. Dr. Droleskey's kind manner and Dr. Lange's great people skills are ingrained in my memory and influence me every day.

I have influenced at least ten students who have become veterinarians. Some were just teenagers when they met me and some only came into my life during veterinary college. I love to hire veterinary students for summer work. What's wonderful for me is that we have a lifelong bond and connection to veterinary medicine. I have benefitted so much by my relationships with these students. They remind me about the how important it is to be enthusiastic about our profession and they also bring new information and techniques into my practice. I get so much out my relationships with students and I look forward to influencing their careers. I hope one day a student will say, "Just put the pill in some liverwurst, that's what Dr. Kornet told me."

Michelle:

Why did you choose to establish your own practice and become [AAHA](#) accredited?

Dr. Kornet:

Working in small animal practices, I had a vision how I wanted to practice. I wanted to be a veterinarian who was accessible to my clients and I wanted to offer high quality services that benefitted my patients. It was very important to me to always look out for the best interests of both my clients and patients. If I performed a test or procedure, I wanted it to have an impact on the quality of life of my patient. I wanted to use my skills and experience to guide my clients.

²¹ Victor T. Rendano, UP '72 (radiologist), Veterinary Radiology Consultation, Lansing, NY.

²² Arnold S. Lesser, UP '69 (surgeon), currently, New York Veterinary Specialty and Emergency Center, Farmingdale, NY.

I thought the best way to accomplish these goals was to own my own practice. This was not an easy goal because when I graduated I didn't have the financial resources to start or buy a practice. In 1982 I had an opportunity to become an associate at [Mid Island Animal Hospital](#) in Hicksville, NY with the hope of becoming a partner in one year. I had a very nice relationship with Robert Halperin, DVM '56²³ and I really enjoyed the practice. A year after I started I walked into Dr. Halperin's office and reminded him that it was time to talk about our partnership. Dr. Halperin shocked me by telling me that he didn't want a partnership—he wanted to sell the practice to me.

In August of 1983 the sale was completed and I started molding Mid Island Animal Hospital into the practice I wanted. At that time there were only five employees. Hours were limited with the hospital being closed on Fridays. I saw great opportunity just by increasing our hours and covering emergencies. Business quickly expanded and I thoroughly enjoyed my new responsibilities.

One thing that was an obstacle to my success and authority was my age. I was only 28 years old and most of the staff member and clients were older than me. I think it was a tremendous shock to the staff members when Dr. Halperin retired, and there was some resentment when I took over.

Since I was already working in the practice for over a year most clients accepted me and the changeover was almost seamless. However, I received a hostile call from a client one afternoon. The client, Mrs. Weber, told me how much she liked Dr. Halperin and she wasn't sure that she was going to stay with the practice. She then proceeded to give me a list of demands that included which employees to retain and hours that I should be open. I listened carefully and was very polite. My goal was to win her over and confrontation wasn't going to accomplish what I wanted. Then Mrs. Weber said, "...and one more thing young man." That didn't sound right to me and I had to take control of the conversation— quickly. So without thinking I said, "That's enough Mrs. Weber, for now on when you address me you will call me *Dr. Young Man*." After that comment I heard a click and realized that she hung up the phone. To this day I cannot believe that I actually said that, but it always puts a smile on my face. Mrs. Weber eventually did come back to the practice.

To accomplish my goal of establishing a high quality practice I felt that it was important to be certified by the American Animal Hospital Association. I felt that AAHA set the standards of small animal practice, and certification would help me stand out amongst my clients and colleagues, and establish how serious I was about high quality veterinary medicine.

²³ Robert S. Halperin '56, currently resides in Stonington, CT

The physical structure of Mid Island Animal Hospital was easily adapted to AAHA standards and we were approved on our first inspection. Being an AAHA-certified hospital has helped me keep up with the latest technology and standards and has helped my practice in so many ways. I think that one of the biggest benefits comes when I am hiring veterinarians. Over the years Mid Island Animal Hospital has increased to a five doctor practice and over 25 employees, and I think that my AAHA certification has helped attract the veterinarians.

I am blessed by having a work environment that is filled with mutual respect and admiration for each other. Many of my employees have been with me for many years. Anne Zeifman, DVM '86²⁴ has been with Mid Island for nearly 20 years and Mary Raciti DVM '95²⁵ has been with us since she finished her [Animal Medical Center](#) internship in 1995.

Michelle:

I've read a little about your involvement in developing a Disaster Preparedness Plan that was put into action on 9-11-01. I'd be very interested to hear more about this.

Dr. Kornet:

In 1998 the [Long Island Veterinary Medical Association](#) asked if I would be interested in working on a disaster preparedness plan. The association already had done some work on a plan, but the veterinarians involved wanted to step down after several years.

I considered the possible disasters that could happen on Long Island and thought that a hurricane, flood, or ice storm wouldn't be too serious. I thought that I could handle anything that came up so I volunteered to be part of a committee.

I thought about what would be required if a disaster occurred so I volunteered to start a data base of veterinarians who would be willing to be part of a team to help in the event of a disaster. In the past surveys were sent out through the LIVMA newsletter asking for volunteers. The response rate was quite low so I decided that I would call every practice on Long Island and personally appeal the director of the hospital to sign on and volunteer if necessary. To my delight, every practice except one agreed to help out. In a few months I had a spread sheet on my desktop with contact information for over 150 practices.

On Tuesday, September 11, 2001 I was leaving my house to play tennis. I was on the way out but I heard a bulletin on the Today show about a plane hitting the World Trade Center and causing mass casualties. My first thought was for my friend, [Michael Lomonaco](#), who was the executive chef of Windows on the World, the famous restaurant at the top of the north tower. Then as events unfolded, Renee turned to me and asked if I thought I would be

²⁴ Anne F. Zeifman '86, Mid Island Animal Hospital, Hicksville, NY

²⁵ Mary Raciti (Seidita) '95, Mid Island Animal Hospital, Hicksville, NY

asked to be involved with the disaster plan. I casually said no, because this was happening in New York City. I didn't expect the LIVMA to get involved.

At the time I didn't realize the scope of damage and loss that was to follow. As it turned out New York City did not have an organized disaster plan. The Long Island Veterinary Medical Association was called for help and through the work of our committee members Howard Flynn, DVM,²⁶ Marc Franz, DVM,²⁷ and Dennis Doherty, DVM²⁸ our disaster plan was activated.

From September 15 until November 3rd I was responsible for getting a team of three veterinarians and technicians to work 12 hour shifts around the clock on alternate weeks. The job of the veterinarians was to treat the search and rescue dogs after a searching at ground zero. Barbara Kalvig, DVM²⁹ from the New York City Association filled the openings on the weeks that I was not covering.

It was an intense time in New York and everyone wanted to help in some way. Most citizens didn't have the opportunity to get involved with the rescue and recovery operation, and I felt lucky that I could do something to make a difference. People from around the world felt the pain and grief of the loss, but every person living in the New York area knew someone who died. Luckily my friend Michael Lomonaco had an eye doctor appointment the morning of September 11 and instead of getting on the elevator to go to work he went to an ophthalmologist's office on a lower floor of the World Trade Center. He survived. However several of my clients died and even the husband of a former receptionist was killed.

You would think that it would be hard to find 42 veterinarians a week to go into Manhattan and work 12-hour shifts, but just the opposite happened. I had to make calls to fill a few positions, but generally I was getting calls from veterinarians asking to work a shift. The calls not only came from the vets from my data base, but from as far away as Maine and Kansas. Things at ground zero were in such chaos that when some of the veterinarians tried to get to the veterinary triage site, they were not permitted to get past the security perimeter. I received many calls at 1:00 AM from veterinarians asking what to do. They could have turned around and gone home, but that never happened. With perseverance everyone got to the area where the dogs were being treated.

The hardest thing for me to do was tell someone that we didn't need their help. A reporter from the [AVMA Journal](#) called me and asked for a comment. The first thing that came into my mind was the following quote, "This is veterinary medicine's finest moment. The

²⁶ Howard F. Flynn (MSU '70), equine practice, Medford, NY

²⁷ Marc A. Franz '88, small animal practice (Woodbury Animal Hospital), Woodbury, NY

²⁸ Dennis J. Dougherty (Ross '90), mixed practice, predominantly small animal, Holtsville, NY

²⁹ Barbara A. Kalvig (WSU '85), small animal practice (Kalgig Shorter Vet Associates), New York City.

problem isn't getting veterinarians and technicians to come down; the problem is telling them that they have to wait three weeks."

Looking back on those days, I am still so impressed by the teamwork of the members of the disaster preparedness committee and veterinarians that I worked with. I was very proud to be a veterinarian.

Michelle:

Final thoughts...

Dr. Kornet:

Sometimes I look back at my time at Cornell and realize how lucky I am to be part of such a vibrant community. In the late 1990's I was asked to be on a committee for the [Agriculture and Life Sciences Alumni Association](#). I found my involvement so rewarding because it reconnected me to Cornell. Over the years I became more and more involved with the CALSAA and in 2007 I was elected president. I had the opportunity to meet Cornellians from all over the country and promote Cornell. During my years with the alumni association I realized that Cornell is a big family, and once you go to Cornell you are always part of that family.

I was once told that I am a "double red" because I have two Cornell degrees. I'm proud to say that in many ways I am a quadruple red, because both of my daughters, Allison in 2004³⁰ and Robin in 2008,³¹ graduated from Cornell. I have had a regular presence on campus for 15 years, and that's more than one-quarter of my life.

Being a part of the legacy project is such a thrill for me. I've been reading the stories of my predecessors, especially the veterinarians from the 1930's.³² What's remarkable to me is that no matter what generation we are in, we are all the same. Veterinarians want to learn, do well, and be good doctors for the sake of our patients. We love animals, and we have unending energy to make the lives of our patients better. And because of the broad scope of our training we are capable of doing some extraordinary things.

I am so proud to be a veterinarian. The work that we do is so important because not only do we affect animal's lives, we affect people's lives. The bond between animals and their owners is so great and we make a difference every day. To the public, veterinarians are celebrities, and we are so respected. I couldn't think of a better profession to be a part of.

³⁰ Allison D. Kornet, BS '04 (communication), currently resides in New York City

³¹ Robin Kornet, BS '08 (communication), currently resides in New York City

³² An Enduring Veterinary Legacy, www.vet.cornell.edu/legacy

There isn't a day that goes by where I don't think, 'wow', I'm just so lucky to be a veterinarian. I can't wait to get to work every day and I know how fortunate I am. I know that our stories will continue to inspire future generations and insure that our legacy will continue.